

# The Other Foot

by Backroads

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Summary: It would just be Hiccup's luck to break his other leg, wouldn't it? And just when things are finally going right.

## 1. Hiccup Gets A Break

Fresh snowfall had never before presented so much of a challenge.

In all other aspects it was a gorgeous morning, the sort of poem-perfect scene to appreciate for the little loveliness Berk could occasionally offer. The sky was pale blue, still brushed with remnants of night fog, the colored version of the icy spark in the air that tingled Hiccup's skin. Or what was exposed of it. From head to toe he was covered in various fur items so that all that was exposed was the space between his eyes. Frost clung to his eyelashes and he raised a mitten-covered hand to attempt to brush the iciness away—the bigger concern being scratching his eye with the rough wool.

On the slope of the hill beneath him the village was slowly awakening. Though the sun had risen not fifteen minutes before the rush to begin the day was not an intense one. Winter was a season that did Berk in. Every drop of water in the ocean seemed to create snow and it was not uncommon to wake up one morning to find one's house completely covered in snow. With digging through snow always a possibility, winter was a time to switch from most other types of work. The warmer months had worked them all to their bones and winter seemed the time for a little respite. Few besides Hiccup bothered to rise early.

He couldn't speak for the rest of them, but the first quiet minutes were ones he desperately needed.

Three weeks. Maybe a little more, but three weeks was as good as estimate as any. He gritted his teeth, tasting loose wool, and twisted his body to follow the crutch that he forced a few precious

feet before him through the unrelenting snow. As pretty as it was its powdery appearance was a lie. Then again, it was up to his waist. Did he really think he could walk through waist-high anything with much ease? Secrets to Thor, all he really cared about at the moment was not falling.

He had done his share of falling over the past three weeks. And no doubt the pattern would continue. Which is why a quiet spectatorless morning was what he needed.

He didn't feel any particular shame. His injury was what it was and it wasn't like he wanted to hide inside away from the tribe. He was apparently their hero, after all—a social status more awkward than he had ever expected. He still had occasional nightmares and they were difficult to share. No one had really seen just what he had seen. His dad just said every Viking saw horrible things that would leave a lesser man shaking in his boots but that bravery was going on despite that terror. Or some other nonsensical adage. Hiccup had no intention of crying into his pillow and writing long sagas of his emotional pain—for Odin's sake, it hadn't been that bad. But he was shaken and everything was still weird and sometimes it was nice to practice walking without three dozen people looking on.

Hiccup's goal that morning was to make it up the hill, take a short walk through the forest, and walk back down the hill. According to Gothi who had somehow forced her way into being the primary source of healing advice it was far too lofty of a goal. But he had managed it a week and a half ago, two days before the first snowstorm, and he had survived it with energy to spare. Walking uphill was definitely the trickiest but that was just why he needed to practice. He figured if he became expert at trudging through the snow spring thaw would only make mobility a breeze. That would be his project this winter. Spring would come and he would be at the level of everyone else.

But, boy, was it going to be a tricky goal. The crest of the hill couldn't have been that far above him, but looking to the top instilled in him a sort of reverse vertigo. He cast his eyes down, suddenly ill.

Okay, he thought, just a little further. You can do this. He forced his crutch against what he hoped was the frozen ground to catch some friction and pulled himself up to meet it. The crutch had been Astrid's idea. A surprising suggestion from someone who had also told him to just "walk it off, you big baby". He grinned at that memory. Apparently the crutch was just her way of compromise. And it was a little more personal than having Toothless forcing him around.

He missed Toothless. It had only been a matter of days and he already missed the dragon. Strange how strong a connection could be. The first snow had sent all the dragons burrowing to the heat beneath the ground. Hooray for hibernation stealing away a guy's best friend. Well, he would perfect his walking by spring and surprise Toothless—if the dragon could even comprehend such things.

The scent of burning wood filled the air, mingling with the fresh cold. Morning fires were being stoked. With any luck Hiccup could make it home before anyone could come out to see their brave hero making his lonely morning sojourn.

Almost to the top he swung his crutch forward like he had done countless times that morning, let his right leg follow, and

The crutch caught nowhere. It slid on something deep beneath the snow and kept on sliding.

Hiccup barely had time to shout out one of the more shocking curses he knew before he smacked face-first into the snow.

If that wasn't a great start to a day. A self-imposed whitewash and now the glamorous act of getting up. That was one thing he still was not very good at, and that was an assessment made indoors on solid ground. He managed to get to his knees. He was pretty sure he looked like some snow beast. Though this was hardly the time to worry about appearance. Knee up, balance, take care to trust that balance

He made it to a clumsy crouch before falling again, this time backwards. It was at that time he discovered four layers of clothing, a replacement leg he still did not know what to do with, and a hidden layer of ice were a terrible combination. He rolled, literal heels-over-head for a good one, two, three, four

He only made it halfway through the fifth. Something hiding in the snow stopped him, hard, and a crack sounded through the air.

For a wild moment he assumed it was a frozen tree branch breaking somewhere in the distance, though he didn't know why that would cause such intense pain.

No, it was not a branch. Something very sturdy in the snow had stopped him—namely, had stopped his right leg.

He let his head fall back into the snow, breathing hard and trying not to scream.

So much for the daily goal.

## 2. Jokes

Gobber's face was grim, the exact same expression he wore when someone died horribly or a metal was flawed. "I'm sorry, Hiccup, but that leg'll have to come off."

Hiccup's heart nearly stopped right there.

Stoick gave a loud groan. "Don't tell him that, he'll

"Yeah, the whole thing. Right under the hip. Hurt like crazy, too."

"Thor's beard, Hiccup," Stoick shouted. "No one's cutting off anything. Gobber, what would possess you to say something like that?"

Gobber gave a shrug, smile bursting into being under his moustache. "Oh, come on, I was just having a little fun. Hiccup gets it, doesn't he?" He thumped Hiccup hard on the shoulder with his good hand.

Hiccup winced in pain. The fact that his heart was still stuck in his throat didn't help. "Yeah, uh-huh. Funny."

"See, Stoick? I told you he would appreciate it."

Stoick continued to look less than amused.

"Actually, Gobber," Hiccup said, letting his head fall back against his pillow. "That was the least funny thing I have ever heard."

And the blacksmith had the nerve to laugh. "Yeah, well, I got a kick out of seeing yer face even if no one else 'round here can appreciate a good joke."

"You are such an idiot," Stoick said. "And I highly doubt Hiccup is in a laughing mood."

That was about right. Hiccup stared at the ceiling. Oh, the good old familiar ceiling of a room that was not his for sleeping. And he had had been so looking forward to getting out of the main quarters of the house. Upstairs. Now that was an epic dream and a half. "What was funny was me screaming for help in the snow for a whole hour." He made sure to fill that sentence with every drop of sarcasm he could summon.

Gobber gave another hearty laugh. "Yeah, that was quite excellent. Like some little girl who had fallen in the snow and couldn't get up. Oh, when I tell that story o'er a few pints of meadâ€"

"Gobber?" Stoick said suddenly.

"Eh?"

"Shut up."

"Okay, but tonight I'll have a storyâ€"ouch."

Hiccup didn't turn his eyes in time to see what sort of injury had been dealt. Rather disappointing. It would be nice to have something else to focus on besides pain. Upon waking up after the Green Death incident pain had been something intense, but also dull and vague. This was a different sort of pain altogether. And having his father and mentor arguing with each other in the same room while the Elder hummed off-key in the background was not helping. Though he did have to admit it probably would have been funny to come upon someone else screaming in the snow for help. He managed a smile.

"So, son," said Stoick now that Gobber had managed to, indeed, follow orders and shut up, "how are you feeling?"

"Like I broke my leg. And like I have frostbite all over my entire body."

"All-over frostbite? Oh, that's nothing. One timeâ€"

"Gobber," came Stoick's warning.

"Jus' trying to take his mind off things."

"Well." Stoick clapped his hands together with deafening results and

beamed down at Hiccup as if "well" was an eloquent phrase of meaning. "Once the Elder has her things ready she'll be taking care of that leg and with any luck maybe she won't be cutting it off either."

No one laughed.

"Gobber's funnier," Hiccup said.

"Don't scare the lad, Stoick," Gobber said in a loud whisper.

"I was just trying to make him feel more comfortable. Last time we did anything he was unconscious and I don't want him screaming in pain orâ€" "

"For the pain." Gothi appeared seemingly out of nowhere and shoved a wad of something foul-smelling and foul-tasting into Hiccup's mouth before moving quickly down to his leg to press her tiny frail hands against the bruises with more might than Hiccup imagined any Viking in the village had.

Screaming in pain did not even begin to cover it.

"Done," she said in her tiny voice as if she had done nothing more than slice a carrot. "It was a clean break. Just needed a bit of adjusting, some more rest and he will be just fine."

Hiccup supposed he should thank her, but he was still trying to catch his breath. He had nearly choked on theâ€| thingâ€| she had given him and it certainly hadn't done much for pain.

She didn't seem to expect thanks. From the corner of his eye he watched her go, sidling right out the door while still humming off-key.

"That wasn't so bad," Stoick said cheerfully.

Hiccup tried to glower at him, but didn't have the strength beyond spitting out what appeared to be random and slightly rotten herbs. "I wish she would have chopped it off instead."

"That's not funny at all," Gobber said with a shake of his head. "And on top of that you've inconvenienced me when I have all this work that needs to be done and you to do it andâ€| eh, I guess I'll let you have your rest. I'll be off, then." He hobbled out the door.

Rest did sound nice. He wasn't sure what else he could possibly be doing. His plans for the day had been entirely ruined. Not to mention his plans for the entire winter. So that leftâ€| what? Sleeping?

Yet that did not appear to be much of an option. His dad was still in the room, arms crossed over his chest. "You really do have a knack for getting yourself into trouble."

The phrase wasn't threateningâ€"friendly, perhaps even rather lovingâ€"but the intent was still there.

Hiccup sighed. "Dad, it wasn't as if I had planned to break my leg. And I wasn't the one who abandoned a boulder in the middle of a hill. I can't lift many heavy objects as we both know."

"I'm just saying it's a funny thing."

"Like all the leg jokes? Yeah, real funny."

"Ironic. You know I mean."

Hiccup was rarely sure of what his dad meant when he spoke. Stoick was not a man big on verbal communication and it was implausibly impressive he was able to give the rousing speeches he did. But he wasn't about to tell his dad that and settled instead for shaking his head.

"I think we can all agree that the past months have been—" Stoick paused, scrunching up his forehead in thought.

"One gigantic mess?" Hiccup supplied helpfully.

"I was actually going for difficult. But I was impressed with the past few weeks. You're a hero. No father could ask for more in a son and I want you to know just how proud I am of you. Not many other fathers can boast of their sons slaying a dragon as monstrously huge as that Death back there. So— just know that I am proud of you. And worried. Your health and safety are important to me and I have to say it terrifies me when anything does happen to you. And I know we have never exactly had the perfect father-son relationship—"

Hiccup's head began to spin. He put a hand to his head and closed his eyes. "Dad, what exactly are you trying to say?"

There was a long pause. "I'm not sure. But you need to listen and not interrupt me."

"Can do. Sorry."

"As you know, son, I'm not going to be around forever and—"

"Why are we talking about your mortality?" Even with his eyes closed he saw red and he was pretty sure he was going to throw up in the near future.

"Hiccup, I told you not to interrupt."

Hiccup pursed his lips together. He had never thought of himself as an interrupter—it was a quality that had always driven him nuts in his father.

"As I was saying! I'm not going to be around forever and though I don't think anyone has ever wanted to say such a thing tradition dictates you would be chief after me. To tell the truth I used to think it would be condemning the entire island to a cursed existence but your actions of late made me change my mind and I think you would be able to offer— a lot. I was going to use this winter to talk to you about— chief things, but now— Hiccup, you already lost a foot and now you're going around breaking the other leg!"

Had his father just rambled on to state the obvious? "Can't you still, you know, talk to me about chief things?"

"Well, of course I can, but that's not the point. How are you

supposed to manage as chief if you can't even take care of yourself?"

Hiccup's eyes snapped open. The light was enough to burn his brain. "Dad, it was an accident!"

"I know." Stoick had his own eyes closed, his hand on his brow. "I know it's not your fault butâ€¦ I have things to be doing. Get some rest. I'll be back tonight."

Hiccup watched his dad leave and looked at the door long after it had closed. Then he let his head drop back to his pillow. Great. Another brilliant father-son conversation. To his credit his dad was trying and maybe Hiccup shouldn't have been soâ€¦ had he always been this snappy? He couldn't shake the feeling that a big apology on his end was in order.

Chief. The word rose to the top of his mind like a neutral thought fleeing all the other bad ones. That wasn't a word tossed around very in front of Hiccup save for references to being the son of the chief. He supposed he had always known the position would one day be his, one of those little factual nuggets tucked away at the back of his mind. Wasn't it something to be excited about? And hadn't his father suggested that maybe he wouldn't be horrible at it? Instead the idea sunk like a rock to the bottom his stomach.

Oh, but his leg hurt. He pushed back the covers. As was habit his first sight was of that other thing, not a foot but a weird contraption of wood and metal that he had amazingly come to depend upon. Even so it was still an alien sight to him, something incomprehensible as necessary. He then forced his gaze to the right leg, the one that looked normal aside from the fact that it was purple and black and swollen. Yep. Definitely broken.

Leaving him entirely unable to walk.

He wasn't sure how he thought about that. All that concerned him was that it hurt and he was now trapped in this bed. Already he was tired of it and its place downstairs- of all crazy places to put a bed, with the fire and the cooking and the door right there for all the traffic of anyone who just wanted to wonder into the house.

Speaking of whichâ€¦

The door burst open and a blur of blonde and blue rushed through it.

"Hiccup!" Astrid jumped onto the bed and Hiccup choked back a scream. "Oh, I'm sorry. Your leg. I heard what happened and I had to come see you." She sprang away from the bed with as much force as her original jump. Another denial of pain.

"Hi, Astrid," he managed to squeak out.

She paused next to the bed, hands on her hips, her cheeks red with the cold and snowflakes clinging to her hair. She was not wearing any sort of coat.

"Did you burst through a Berk snow to see me?" he asked.

She waved a hand. "Eh, it's just snow. I need to build up my resistance to cold."

"That's a stupid thing to say."

"What's stupid is this." She gestured at his leg. "You broke it. You're left with one leg and you immediately set about breaking it."

"Yeah, my father has already established that."

"How are you feeling?" Without waiting for an answer she put a hand to his head. "You're warm. You're going to get a fever."

Hiccup was sure some of the warmth was just Astrid touching him. Nothing like having a pretty girl touching you when you're incapable of movement. "I'm fine."

"Are you? Because I've seen people with broken bones before and they never seem all that fine afterwards."

"I'm seeing red. Does that count as something?"

"Yes. I think that would be normal." She sat down on the bed next to him. "Hiccup, were you practicing walking?"

"Yes. What's wrong with that?"

"Um, the fact that you were walking in a place where you were at risk for falling and breaking what appendages you have left, you idiot."

"I did it last week. Same place." He grimaced as a wave of pain rolled up from his leg. The blur of red before his eyes increased.

She sighed. "Hiccup, I was sort of hoping, when you were up to it, going for a walk. Together. Just us. Maybe see where the dragons buried themselves."

"Like a date?"

A few moments passed before she responded. "Yes, Hiccup. Exactly like a date. But I don't think that's going to happen for awhile."

She sounded like she was a mile away. "We can still go for a walk someday."

"Not with you like this."

"Hey, I just have a broken leg and another leg I can't really use andâ€¦" He could hear his words slurring together. What exactly had Gothi given him?

In the blur that was now his sight he could see Astrid smiling at him. "Look, I'm sorry. I know you didn't mean to fall and I really wanted to see how you were doing."

She was so pretty. He smiled. "Yeah. I'm glad you came." His eyes closed. "I really wish we could goâ€¦"



"You need your rest."

"Uhâ€|huhâ€|"

He was vaguely certain she kissed him on the cheek, but by then was too out of it to respond.

### 3. Ruff the Healer

Following his battle with the Death Hiccup had experienced a stretch of unconsciousness that hadn't allowed much in the way of dreams, which apparently was just as well in the nature of healing. A good deep sleep where the mind could rest and let the body do what it needed to do. Of course, the awakening had not been as pleasant as it could have been and had been followed by a series of not-so-wonderful sleeps in which Hiccup had dreamt all sorts of crazy things. Amazing how the subconscious could respond to a physical injury. It was more than embarrassing to admit but Hiccup had awoken at least once in the middle of the night screaming in fresh shock over his injury. The dreams themselves had become more-or-less vague but from what he did remember they usually had something to do with that foot of his.

Gothi's medicine may have been a contributing factor but Hiccup slipped into a dream involving a rabid sea monster with blood-covered scales chomping both of his legs to pieces.

At least he didn't awake screaming. His eyes snapped open to see the familiar ceiling and the morning events came right back to him. Great. He had sort of hoped it all would have been a dream and he wasn't in an even bigger mess than before. Nope, no dream. His right leg was throbbing. Not as badly as beforeâ€"perhaps there was something to Gothi's techniques. He put his hands to his sides and carefully pushed himself up to sit. Every movement of his leg was painful.

Astrid. Astrid had come to see him. She had been upset with him for breaking his leg. Like it was not an accident. Did no one grasp that concept but him? Hiccup looked around the room from wall to wall. No Astrid. "Astrid?"

No reply. She had definitely left.

How long had he slept? Stoick wasn't back. The fire burned lower. He shivered. Okay, so apparently a few hours had passed. Maybe more than a few. But Astrid could have stayed. Brought along something to keep herself busy. He tried to think.. What did Astrid do when she wasn't out practicing with every weapon she could get her hands upon? The mental image of Astrid sitting in a chair next to a fire sewing things made him laugh. But the laugh quickly faded as he remember the walk. She had wanted to take a walk. With him. Like a date. As a date.

Stupid stupid leg.

Well, did that mean a date was impossible? She could have sat next to him and they could have talked, maybe played a game or two. And instead he had to conk out and she had to get bored and leave and

along with that left the opportunity for a date! He let his head bang back against the headboard.

It was at that time he realized something else his body was telling him. A sharp and desperate urgency. Oh, fantastic. Just how much water had he drank that morning?

"Dad?" he called loudly. Maybe he had missed his dad entering the house and going upstairs or maybe he was just outside within reasonable hearing distance. "Dad?"

No response. No Dad, no Astrid. No Toothless with whom he would have felt slightly less awkward stumbling out against in order to take a piss. This had to be the very definition of humiliation. Since when did he have to rely on someone to assist him the basic functions of his body? Well, the bed-wetting episodes of his life had ceased years before and there was no way he was going to return to them. He threw back the covers and, trying to scream, half-lowered himself half-rolled to the floor. He tried to land so his left leg would take the brunt of the move but he still wound up biting his lip until he tasted blood.

This was beyond pathetic. Oh, to see himself. Oh, to hope that no one would conveniently enter in time to see him like this. The opportunity for assistance had never come and now he was completely on his own and he intended it to stay that way.

Even so, it would have been so much easier with Toothless. He missed that dragon. So much for impressing him by spring.

He pushed himself to his hands and knees and for the first time wondered if this were truly a good idea. At least his bladder thought so. One vote in that direction, good enough. So he crawled along the floor, his right being dragged more than anything with every bump sending waves of intense pain through him. And the floor was ridiculously splintery.

He began to rethink the wisdom of the idea. But at that point the door was closer than the bed and he didn't have long before he felt he would burst. A few painful crawls, the self-will not to scream, and he was there. Now for opening the door. It wasn't that hard. He reached up for the handle, braced his left foot against the wall, and managed to tug the door open. Just outside the door would have to do it.

The air was mercilessly cold and Hiccup's hands were numb before he even started wrestling and squirming enough to get his pants down a workable distance. As far as he could tell no one was watching a boy half-kneeling just outside his door to relieve himself.

It was only when he was finished did he discover the event had not been as clandestine as he had hoped. He was in the process of pulling his pants back up when out of the corner of his eye he spotted the forms of the Thorston twins just down the hill.

Oh gods. Tuffnut was no big deal except for the strange place and position but a girl was an entirely different matter altogether. Had they seen him?

They were already making their way up the hill at the top speed the

mess of snow would allow, Ruffnut laughing madly.

"Real classy, Hiccup!" she shouted up at him. "Did you forget your house is in prime view from pretty much everywhere else in the village?"

Tuffnut joined in the laughter. "And how in the domain of Hel did you manage to do it lying down?"

"I wasn't lying down exactlyâ€" Hiccup tried to defend.

"Oh, please. That was the least manly thing I have ever seen and I think you could at least the pride to stand up."

They were right in front of them now. Hiccup couldn't even look at them. Had it ever been so humiliating to do his business in front of a girl?

"Boys are so crude with these things Ruffnut said as she continued to laugh.

"Oh, come on. You are without a doubt the crudest person in the village," her brother said.

"Yeah, I suppose you're right."

"But never mind that. I want to know why Hiccup is lying on his doorstep like some half-dead animal whose bowels just gave up in anticipation of death andâ€" "

"Because I can't get up," Hiccup said. He struggled to sit up again and the broken leg protested fiercely. He couldn't suppress a grimace. "Odin's eye, that hurt. I broke my leg this morning."

"Oh." At least that shut them up.

In fact, at least ten whole seconds passed before Tuff gave another laugh. "Wow. You have like the worst luck of anyone in the tribe. Did they chop that one off, too?"

"Did it look like anyone chopped it off?"

"Hey, I was just making a joke."

Ruff slugged him. "Hey, he's hurt, you idiot. You can't make jokes about it."

Tuffnut rubbed his shoulder in obvious pain. "You started laughing first."

"That's before I knew he was hurt. Duh. Do you see me laughing at him now?" She gave him another shove.

Hiccup wondered if he could sneak back in the house while they were at each other's throats. Though he did not look forward to another slow and painful crawl across the floor. "Do you think that since you're here you could give me a handâ€" |"

"Why, did you break that, too?" Tuff asked with a grin.

Had the twins always been this obnoxious?

But at least Tuff had the whereabouts to pull Hiccup's arm over his shoulder and hoist him up while Ruff gave annoying instructions about how to do it correctly. "Sorry about breaking your leg. I mean, that has to suck. It seems all the bad stuff happens to you and I guess I'm sorry about laughing at you out there but it was pretty funny."

"It was humiliating," Hiccup replied. "Thanks for this, though. Becauseâ€|"

"It really hurts?" Ruff asked.

Some strange notion of Viking pride kept Hiccup from agreeing. "Wellâ€|"

"Because I don't think it's a great idea to be treating a broken leg that way. Dragging it and bumping it and moving itâ€| I wouldn't be surprised if you made it worse."

By then Hiccup and Tuffnut had made it to the bed and Tuff practically dropped Hiccup against it. "Made it worse?" He thought of the sudden pain earlier. "No, the bone was set andâ€"

"And you probably moved it again, " Ruffnut said. "I can't believe you would risk hurting your leg again just so you wouldn't humiliate yourself by wetting the bed."

"I would," Tuff said. "Breaking a limb is no excuse forâ€"

Ruff shoved her brother out of the way. "Hiccup, let me see the leg."

Her eyes were a little too bright and her smile a little too broad and Hiccup was not sure if he trusted her. "Why?"

"I want to see if you moved the bone again with your stupidity." Without waiting for him she was shoving up the leg of his pants to reveal the ever-growing bruise on the side of his leg. "Yeah, it's all funny-shaped."

Was it? Hiccup couldn't tell. "How do you know?"

She rolled her eyes. "Hey, I have set bones before."

"Really?"

"Yeah, I helped a couple of times and I fixed Astrid's shoulder once. It's easy. I'll do it for you."

Hiccup gripped the edge of the blanket in panic. "I don't think shouldâ€"

"Oh, come on!"

Hiccup looked desperately to Tuffnut, who was examining a shield on the wall, completely oblivious to the conversation. Not that Hiccup trusted him to be of any help. "Ruff, I think I would rather have

someoneâ€œ" "

"Are you saying I'll never live up to my lifelong dream of becoming a healer?"

"Since when do you have a lifelong dream of becoming a healer?" Maybe if he could keep her talking she would leave his leg alone.

"Since right now. And I have seen it done and I did help. You just move the bones where they're supposed to be andâ€œ" "

"Oww!" Hiccup thrashed as she pushed down on his leg. It hurt even worse than when Gothi had done it.

Ruff was silent for a few moments. "Maybe I should have had Tuff hold you down while I did it."

Hiccup wanted to ask her what she was talking about but he could only fight for his breath.

"Yeah, well, the past is the past and it looks mostly right. No need to thank me."

"Just do it again if you did it wrong," Tuffnut called, his eyes now on a sword. "Hiccup, your dad has some really cool stuff."

Hiccup couldn't respond to that. Ruffnut was already moving her hands up and down his shin pushing the bone and muscles in horribly painful ways. He clenched his teeth, determined not to scream again.

When he opened his eyes Ruffnut had stepped away from the bed, a smile spread across her face. "There. Now that looks right. You should be just fine if you don't set such high standards for urination."

"Thanks. I think."

"Anytime. I wonder if anyone else in Berk has broken a bone. I think I need a little more practice. Oh, I am going to be the best healer this tribe has ever seen."

"Until they run you from the village," Tuff said. He returned to the bedside. "So where's Astrid. I assumed she would have come over to see you. Ruff won't say anything to me about how Astrid feels about you so I thinkâ€œ|" His voice became momentarily concerned. "I think that means Astrid likes you. Because she won't say anything about it. Or is it the other way around?"

"Astrid did come over." Hiccup winced. Even speaking hurt. "She had wanted to go on a walk today."

"But you can't walk."

"Yes, I'm well aware of that. So she didn't want to go on a walk later and then I fell asleep and when I woke up she was gone."

"Hey, you can't expect her to wait around all day," Ruff said. She was continuing to watch him, like she was hoping he would break another bone right in front of her. "She has a life and it does not revolve around you."

"I know that. I was just sayingâ€œ"

"You were saying that but it sounded like you were complaining that she wasn't here which you have no right to say it because it's not like you own her or anything."

Tuff laughed. "And this from the girl who wants nothing more than a boyfriend."

Ruffnut whirled on her brother with a glare. "I. Am. Talking. To. Hiccup!"

Hiccup really wished both of them would go away. "Okay, I know I don't own her and she can go wherever she likes. I get it." But would it have been too much to stay next to the side of someone he hoped she cared about?

"Good," said Ruff. "Do you also know that you really can't be all that interesting with two useless legs?" She sighed. "And to think of all the fun we could have had this winter."

Winter entertainment with the twins usually involved them forcing his face into the snow. Hiccup stared at her.

She shrugged. "Hey, I'm sorry about your leg. But what can I say? So you try not to fall out of bed and we will take off now."

"And we will say hi to Astrid if we see her," said Tuffnut with a wave.

They didn't even properly shut the door behind them.

However, it was not too long before Hiccup found himself missing the company. Lying there in a bed with nothing to do was bound to possibly be the most boring thing that had ever happened to him. So this was what fate had decreed? Either put up the Thorston twins or suffer in boredom? Which was worse?

Had anyone ever thought of him that obnoxious?

The thought had sprung from nowhere to echo clear and solid in his mind. He was well-aware he had never been easy to tolerate, but exactly why was that so? Few people were capable of tolerating the twins and at least Hiccup had never tried to be "helpful".

All right, so that wasn't entirely true.

It was not a notion he wanted to ponder, so he did his best to force it away.

Maybe Astrid would come by before nightfall. Maybe. She wouldn't be the kind to cancel any possibility of a date just because he had broken a leg? Would she?

No. No negative thinking. Astrid liked him. He was sure she liked him.

And she would be back. That had to be sure.

It didn't make him feel any better, though. The house was, there was no other word for it, lonely. Astrid was off doing something, his dad was off doing whatever he did, and Toothless had chosen to hibernate, of all things. Somehow Toothless was the most offensive. Toothless, who could understand what he was going through without saying a word about it but just being there when he needed him to be there.

But no. Toothless wasn't there.

He was being ridiculous. It hadn't even been a full day yet and already he was imagining horrible fantasies in which he was completely abandoned. It was stupid and pathetic and logically not true and it was not the past all over again.

"Who left the door open?"

"Astrid!" Hiccup didn't mean for his voice to be quite so jubilant.

"Hi, Hiccup." This time she had furs on. She pushed the door closed and smiled at him. "I guess you are feeling better."

Feeling better? He still thought a good scream was what he needed. He hurt worse than ever. "Yeah, I woke up and you were gone."

She nodded and shoved her furs to the floor. "Sorry about that. You were asleep and you just kept sleeping and even though you're kind of cute when you sleep I was getting a little bored. So I left."

So Ruff had been right. Astrid had been bored. "What did you do?"

She shrugged and sat on the bed next to him. She smelt like sweat and flour. "Nothing much. I went hunting, caught a rabbit, went for a walk, talked with some people, went home for a while, did some stuff there."

"You could have brought something here to do."

She made a face. "Like what? Sewing? Hiccup, I don't sew. How's your head?" She put a hand to his forehead. "Yeah, you're still a little warm. Is that why the door was open?"

"No, Ruff and Tuff came over and didn't shut it."

"Why were they were?"

He really didn't want to talk about it. "To talk, I guess. Iâ€¦ umâ€¦ Ruff said the bones slipped and so she said she could fix it and I think she probably made it worse. Can you think of anyone less qualified to fix a bone?"

"Lemme see it." Astrid pushed the blankets aside to look at his leg. "I once dislocated my shoulder and Ruff popped it right back in. She's pretty good at it. Yeah, I guess this looks all right."

Ruff had done it right? "How would you know?"

Astrid frowned. "Because it doesn't monstrosly deformed. Believe it or not I have seen broken bones and this one looks correct."

"Maybe the bone never moved in the first place and there was nothing to move back."

"Maybe. Or maybe you did something stupid and moved when you shouldn't have and someone helped you out." Her eyes locked with his. "Did you move when you shouldn't have?"

"Iâ€| He had never been good at lying. And now she was staring at him and he was on the spot. "Well, it's kind of hard to do things that need to be done when no one is around to help you! I can't walk! You're the one that went off and left me here so you could go actually do things andâ€""

Astrid hopped from the bed, marched over to her pile of furs, and pulled out a small fur she pulled away to reveal some sort of pie.

"I went hunting so I could make you a meat pie because I thought you might be hungry!" she shouted. "I'm sorry I left when it was apparently so inconvenient for you and you're right, maybe I shouldn't have. But I am not going to sit around and act like your own personal thrall!"

"I never saidâ€""

She flung the pie at him. Her aim ailed and the pie hit the headboard above himâ€| only to pop from his dish and plop right down onto his head.

"And you didn't need to shout at me!" She pulled the rest of the furs over her and stopped from the house. At least she was sure so to slam the door shut.

He could only stare at he closed door.

He hadn't realized he had been yelling.

#### 4. One of those father&son bonding things

\_Thanks so much to everyone who has been reading this. It's so appreciated.\_

\_By the way, if anyone is interested, the Sticks and Stones forum is hosting a holiday writing contest. The entries are due December 14. Google Sticks and Stones zetaboards.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Trouble with your food?"<p>

Hiccup jolted from a hazy half-sleep to stare at his father standing just inside the doorway brushing snow from his broad shoulders. The small window revealed the long ago arrival of night and he found himself wondering just when that had happened. The room was cold with the inlet of winter air, the fire having died down. He pulled the blanket around himself. "What?"

Stoick gestured at a spot above Hiccup's head. "Did you have trouble



with your food? Forget how to eat it?"

Hiccup stared at him.

The faint smile on his dad's face faltered for a moment. "That is food. Right?"

Oh. Astrid's rabbit pie. He thought he had cleaned it up, but a quick glance above him proved otherwise as his eyes fell on a rather large section of gravy-covered meat. It earned his stare for awhile before he looked back to his father. "You were trying to make a joke. Right?"

Stoick gave something between a shrug and a smile. "I tried. I guess I still don't understand that sort of thing. I thought it would make you laugh orâ€|"

Hiccup managed a smile. "Yeah, it failed."

"Yeah, I guess so."

Oh, the constant series of awkward silences between them.

"Astrid brought the pie for me," Hiccup finally said. Ouch. It was painful even to say her name. The sound of the door slamming behind her still echoed in his ears.

"And that's how you eat it?" Stoick attempted another joke. "By throwing it on your headboard?"

Hiccup shrugged and silently debated whether or not to tell the whole story. There didn't seem much of a point. "It's a long story."

Stoick nodded and lowered himself into a chair. "I'm listening."

Hiccup hadn't expected that sort of response. His dad wasn't all that great at listening and he had such a weird way to fake he was ready to listen. "Um. She went out hunting and snagged a rabbit."

"Yes."

"And thenâ€| I guess she took it home and skinned it and cooked itâ€|"

The fake expression of attentive listening was already beginning to wane on Stoick's face. "All right. I'm following."

Hiccup suddenly felt strange lying down. He hadn't even bothered to sit up when his father had walked in. He wiggled up to a sitting position, wincing at his leg. "And then she made it into a pie. Not sure how she did that. I guess how you would normally bake a pie."

Stoick sighed. "Are you just going to tell me the process for baking a pie?"

"Is that what it sounds like I'm doing?"

"I'm afraid so."

"Sorry." He wasn't sure when he had last had such a long conversation with his father. It was taking forever. "Well, she made a pie and brought it here and threw it at me."

That made Stoick hesitate. Hiccup almost expected a laugh from him but instead he asked the obvious "Why did she throw a pie at you?"

"I don't know. She was mad."

Stoick slapped his hands on his knees. "Well, that settles it. She threw the pie because she was mad at you."

"Yeah, I figured as much." Hiccup tentatively reached for his right leg. It felt red and hot to the touch. Stupid other leg. "Girl gets mad, she throws something."

"That's how women react. The question is why she was mad at you."

"That, I can't figure out."

Stoick sighed and stood up. "That seems to be the difficult part with women. Did you say anything to her?"

"She said I was yelling at her." He flinched and not from pain. He had never before imagined himself yelling at Astrid. She wasn't the type that deserved to be yelled at. "Okay, maybe I deserved it."

"Probably."

And that was it for the fatherly advice? Hiccup let out a lungful of air and let his body collapse back into the bed. "Now I have to somehow get her back here and apologize."

Stoick nodded. "Probably."

His dad was so eloquent.

"Well, son, I imagine you're hungry." Stoick pulled wood from the pile and threw into the fire, sending a dangerous explosion of sparks cascading into the air. "I mean, since you didn't eat that pie or anything."

Hunger. Hiccup hadn't thought about any food besides the pie in hours. He didn't feel particularly hungry but the words that had been drummed into him for the past few weeks had apparently made their stand: he needed to regain his strength and that required food. He shrugged. "I guess so. Yes, I'm hungry."

"I will cook up a chicken for you then. Sorry it's not rabbit."

"Still not funny, Dad."

For a long series of minutes there was nothing but the sound of food

preparation and the crackle of the fire. A habit inside of Hiccup insisted he get up and help but apparently that wasn't a possibility. Maybe he should ask his dad to double-check his leg and see if Ruffnut had made it worse.

Or maybe he should trust that she knew what she was doing.

"So what did you do to make her mad?" Stoick asked the question with a surprising amount of cheerfulness.

Hiccup wasn't sure how to respond to that. "I guess I made her madâ€¦ becauseâ€¦ I got mad at her because she left to make a pie."

"Was the pie any good?"

"I didn't get to eat any of it. I thought that's why you were fixing supper."

Stoick frowned at the pot. He had never been much of a cook. "Yeah... you'll have something to eat, don't worry about that. I hope you like meatâ€¦ I don't know what this is going to come out as. Well, supper will be a surprise."

"I'm stoked for it, Dad."

"Good, because I don't think I'll be eating it. So. Astrid. The girl you like."

Hiccup nodded. "That'd be her."

"You can't just get mad at girls. Like this Astrid. Women don't handle it well. They think with their emotions. It's a messy and dangerous process. You speak to a girl the wrong way and she doesn't hear just your words, she hears how you say it. Raise your voice to a woman, even to say what is practical and obvious, and you'll spend a long time regretting it."

If that wasn't the sense of foreboding of the season. Hiccup closed his eyes for a moment. Just how mad was Astrid at him? It wasn't like she had never been mad at him before. "Dad, can I ask you a question?"

Questions had always terrified his father and the hint of panic was already in his eyes. "Of course, but that's pretty much all I know about womenâ€¦"

"Am I ever ungrateful?"

Silence.

"That's means yes, doesn't it?"

Stoick sighed, put a hand to his forehead, and sat heavily down back into the chair. "Hiccup, you are a wonderful son and I'm very proud of you. Except when you do stupid and clumsy things like you did today. But, yes. Sometimes you have been rather ungrateful."

"Great," Hiccup muttered under his breath.

"I think all kids are like that. So don't feel bad! But it is hard to deal with a kid who I want to protect, who I want to do things for, and only hear complaints in return... it's difficult."

Hiccup wasn't that whiney. Wasn't he? "Maybe I should have thanked Astrid for the pie."

"I thought that was how I raised you."

Hiccup sat up again and almost moved to get out of bed. Ouch. A bad idea. "Now I don't even have a way to apologize to her."

"Maybe she'll come back tomorrow."

Stoick didn't sound all that concerned. Did the man just have some unfailing hope that everything would just work out?

No walking, no Toothless, and now no Astrid.

And now the chicken was beginning to burn.

## 5. Apologies

Fevers were funny things. A sharp rise in body temperature with no other explanation other than the body wanting to complain over something or other such as an injury that was an accident. A stubborn reaction that was a disaster by itself, attacking nearly every part of the body but taking special pleasure in what it could do to the brain. Delirium was its passion and it meant passion in its own solid sense of the word. One minute Hiccup was admittedly feeling a bit feverish and the next he occasionally and briefly conscious of weird and fuzzy shapes and noises and strange ramblings in stranger tongues coming from what very well could be his own mouth.

There was even a point where Hiccup was certain Ruffnut was in the room, her head thrown back while she cackled evilly over what she had done to him. If he could have sprung from that bed he would have been after her like he had never been raised to not hit girls. Perhaps it was just as well, as she was perched far across a gulf that inexplicably had formed in the center of the room without so much as even splitting the house.

A more sensible part of him insisted it was a dream and Ruff had never bothered to enter the house. Yet every now and then he thought he heard himself complaining to her in dismay about how she had made everything worse.

At least Ruff was a reasonable object of focus. The rest of the world was a blur of red and black and colors never before seen. Fire engulfed his body without having the decency of putting him out of his misery. Some of the fire was breathed by Toothless, which Hiccup supposed he didn't mind though he still wished he had trained the dragon better than that.

Then his eyes sprang open, the same result as being jolted from sleep, and saw Astrid sitting next to him on the bed, her face wearing a dismal frown and her right hand preoccupied in wiping some warm and wet rag on his face.

Astrid, he tried to say, though his vocal chords did not seem inclined to work so hard. Ah, so it had worked. He wasn't too sure of the details, but he was vaguely aware of some scheme he had created to get Astrid back. He was certain he had come up with it while Toothless had been breathing all that fire on him. Apparently it had worked. The dragon was good for so many things. His own personal muse.

That may have been the craziest thing he had ever thought.

"You're awake," Astrid said stiffly as she dipped the rag into a shallow bowl before resuming wiping. "I guess that fever had to break at some time."

A fever. That explained everything. Didn't excuse the stupidity of his thoughts. He tried to speak again. "Astrid?"

"Oh, so you're saying my name, now."

"Your name?" His throat hurt. Two-word sentences were clearly beyond his current ability. Why would he not be saying her name, beyond the obvious physical limits? He had wanted her to come back and see him and here she was. Was that not proof he had once said her name or was that just ridiculous fever dreams coming back to haunt him?

"Yes, my name." Astrid let the rag fall to the bed beside them where a wet stain slowly began to spread. "Astrid Hofferson. The girl you supposedly liked."

"Astrid, I don'tâ€¦" They had been in a fight. A stupid fight, probably his fault. Definitely his fault. She had thrown a rabbit meat pie at him and he had yelled at her. The incident seemed a distant memory. "Are you still mad about the pie?"

She rolled her eyes and drew a deep breath and for a horrible moment Hiccup thought she was going to scare him by holding her breath for too long. "Yes, I'm still mad about that! Among other things."

He hated not being able to remember. "What other things?"

"I get it. You break both legs. Sad misfortune. I'm sorry. But tough it up for once. You yell at me and you act like a baby. I try to forgive you and let it go because you aren't feeling well and then when your dad says you've developed a fever I feel sorry for you. I come over to help and hear you saying Ruff's name instead."

Hiccup stared at her. "What?"

Her teeth were clenched and she wasn't bothering to look at him. This wasn't Astrid the pretty girl. This was Astrid the Warrior in a place that he didn't think called for Astrid the Warrior. "I know you don't like her that way but I kind of wished I had heard my name."

He wanted to sit up, perhaps exude a little more confidence, but his body refused to cooperate. "I dreamt she was trying to kill me."

Astrid's cheeks went pink, but she didn't smile. "What?"

"She made it worse, didn't she? When she fixed my leg? She made it worse and caused the fever and I guess I dreamt she was trying to kill me."

She looked as if she wanted to think about laughing. "Actually, Gothi said Ruff did a very good job."

So now everyone assumed he was picking on Ruff? "If she did such a good job I wouldn't have had a fever. Isn't that how it works?"

"Please. You were well onto having a fever before you decided to crawl out of bed and mess up the leg again."

"I was?" Hiccup wasn't sure he believed her.

Astrid must have sensed the distrust in his voice because she was still nowhere near smiling. And to think he had thought she had such a cute smile. Her scowl was more terrifying than her smile was adorable. "Yes, Hiccup, you were already feverish when I first saw you the other day. Maybe I should invite Ruffnut over and you can personally thank her for fixing your leg."

"Is that sarcasm?"

"You're good at it, what do you think?"

He closed his eyes for a moment. "Got it. Sarcasm. All right."

"Though it might really do you some good to thank her."

"Okay, okay, I'll thank her." He tried again to move. "Do you want me to waltz over to her place?"

"You sure are crabby when you wake up." Astrid picked up the rag and placed it back on the bowl which she then placed on a nearby chair.

That wasn't fair. "I woke up to you in a bad mood. You could have been at least a little nice to me."

"After you yelled at me? Maybe I don't want to be nice to you."

Apologies. Right. He remembered discussing that with Stoick. "I really am sorry about that." He scrutinized his tone, wondering if it sounded sincere enough. Or was it too sincere and therefore sounding forced?

Astrid's cheeks went pink again as she shot him a glance. "I'm sorry, too."

"I had no right to yell at you."

"I thought about it. Fishlegs said you probably wanted me more than a pie. He's probably right."

Hiccup tried to smile. Even that was painful. "I think that was it."

She gave a little smile, then bent over to kiss his cheek. She made a face. "Sorry. You're still really sweaty."

"Or you were wiping that stuff on me." Hiccup's nose was returning to its function and the aroma was almost overwhelming. "What is that?"

"I don't know," Astrid said with a shrug. "Your dad got it from Gothi but then your dad had to leave so I offered to do it and apparently it worked because the fever finally broke. Stinks to Valhalla, though."

That was an understatement. Hiccup twisted again but failed to sit up.

"You can stop doing that."

"Doing what?"

"Moving." Astrid hopped from the bed. "Your dad had to tie you down."

Hiccup's gaze moved down his body. Sure enough, three ropes had him tied down to the bed. Panic burst in his mind and he began wriggling more than ever.

"Stop it, Hiccup, it's there for a reason. You kept thrashing around in bed so your dad got the great idea to tie you down."

"Sounds like something my dad would do."

Astrid laughed. A perfect laugh, an actual happy laugh. "I thought he was nuts but he is the chief and your father so I figured I wouldn't say anything. He thinks he knows best, doesn't he?"

Hiccup laughed as well. "I thought you idolized him."

"Yeah, he's a great warrior. But he's not as smart as you."

"I'm glad you've gone from insulting me to complimenting me." He wriggled again. "Erm, can these be removed yet?"

"If you don't promise to move around, sure." She pulled a knife from her belt and slashed the ropes. The cut quick and fell to the floor with audible slaps.

"Thanks." He rubbed his arms. It was good get blood flowing again. "I feel like a baby, having to be tied down to a bed."

"Well, you sure were whining like one."

"Yeah." He didn't want to get back into that conversation, yet his mind was already there. "My dad said I am a complainer."

"Hiccup."

"Am I?"

"Hiccup, you're not going to be one of those people that nearly dies and goes all sentimental on everyone because you should have done it earlier at a better situation than breaking your leg."

Maybe it was a little late for it.

"So don't start complaining about how you're being treated like a baby. You're injured. Accept it."

"Well, I suppose winter's the best time as any to be stuck in a bed." He tried to force a grin. "What do you think?"

"I guess you're right. No dragons, no point."

Astrid sighed. "About that."

"About what?"

"The dragons." She shook her head.

And the panic returned. "What?"

"Look, it's not all been your fault. I know I've been in a bad mood, too. I get it. I miss the dragons, it's all so new, and thenâ€¦"

Something was wrong.

"How long have I been out of it?" Hiccup asked.

"Almost three days."

He nodded. He had hoped to get more out of her. "And my dad's out somewhere?"

"Yeah. Hiccup, there was a storm, and one of the dragons froze to death."

End  
file.